

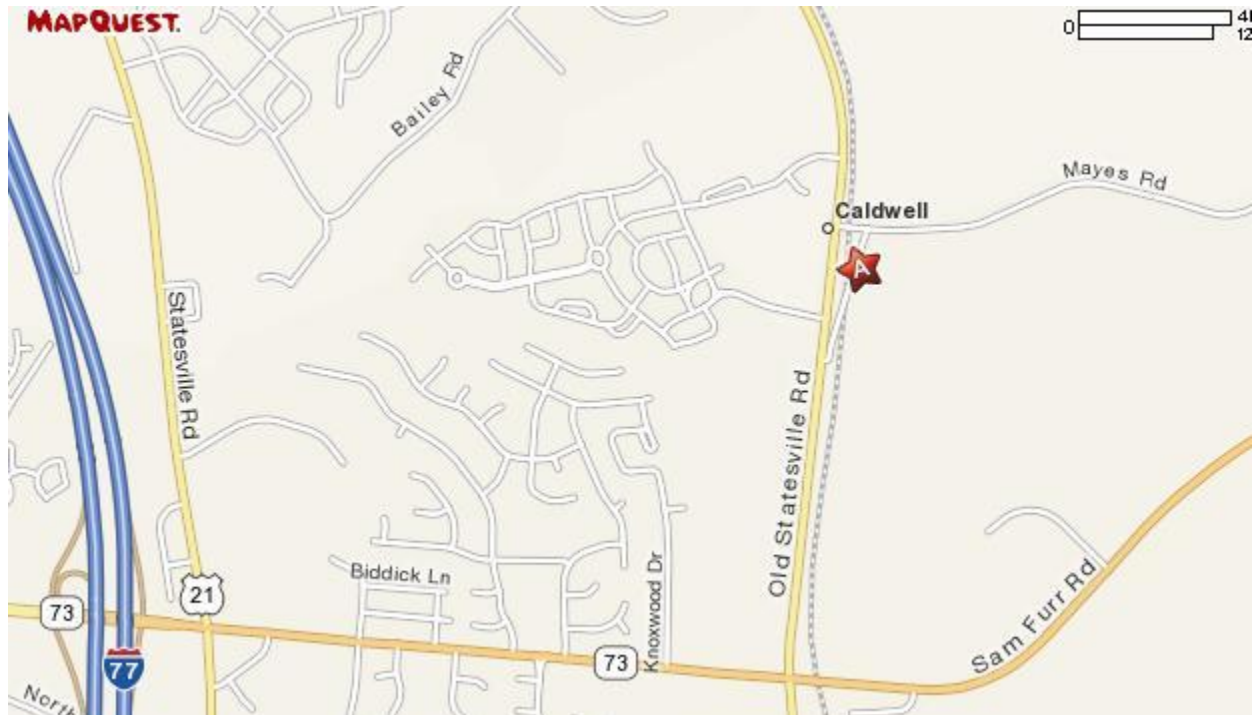
# **Survey and Research Report**

## **On The**

### **Caldwell Station School**



- 1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as Caldwell Station School is located at 17616 Caldwell Station School Rd, Huntersville, N.C.
- 2. Name, address, and telephone number of the current owner of the property:**  
  
Preschool Inc.  
17616 Caldwell Station School Rd.  
Huntersville NC 28078
- 3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.
- 4. A map depicting the location of the property:**



**5. Current Tax Parcel Reference and Deed to the property:** The tax parcel number of the property is 01103203. The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 8782 page 595 (10/17/1996). UTM coordinates are 514343.2 E and 3923113.7N



**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S 160A-400.5.**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Caldwell Station School possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) The Caldwell Station School is a well preserved example of early 20th century rural school architecture in Mecklenburg County.

2) The Caldwell Station School demonstrates the rapid evolution of rural schools in Mecklenburg County in the first half of the 20th Century from widely scattered small schoolhouses into larger "union" schools located in the county's towns.

3) The Caldwell Station School is the most substantial surviving building associated with the place known as "Caldwell Station" a small rural commercial and transportation center with origins that can be traced to the 1850s.

4) The Caldwell Station School is important for understanding the history of Mecklenburg County in that it vividly demonstrates the nature of rural schools in the county during the first half of the 20th Century

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description prepared by Stewart Gray demonstrates that the property known as the Caldwell Station School meets this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the school building is \$33,100. The current appraised value of the 1.08 acres of land is \$62,300. The property is zoned R. The property is exempt from the payment of Ad Valorem Taxes.

**10. Portion of the Property Recommended for Designation.** The school building and the 1.08 acres of land associated with tax parcel number 01103203.

## **A Brief History of the Caldwell Station School**

### **Caldwell Station**

Commercial and civic development in the area known as Caldwell Station predates the introduction of the railroad into northern Mecklenburg County. Andrew Springs built a fine plantation house there before the Civil War when the place was called "Hickory Grove." Chalmers Davidson describes Hickory Grove in his book The Plantation World Around Davidson and in this book notes that Springs operated a store and ran a post office. Springs is listed as Post Master at "Hickory Grove" in Mecklenburg County in an 1842 listing of post offices. (1)



**Above photograph of Hickory Grove was taken as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in 1934**

How the area came to be called Caldwell is unclear. The place is less than two miles from another large plantation, Glenwood, which was owned by D.A. Caldwell. Andrew Springs's daughter Mary married D.A. Caldwell's brother Major John Caldwell so it is possible that members of the Caldwell family lived at Hickory Grove.(2) After the Civil War, the name Hickory Grove is no longer used, and the area is known as some version of the name Caldwell. The importance of the place surely increased with the completion of the Atlantic, Tennessee and Ohio Railroad between Charlotte and Davidson (then called Davidson College) in 1861. While the railroad line was removed during the Civil War, service was restored to Davidson by 1873. (3) That same year a post office was reestablished at Caldwell. (4) The name "Caldwell's" is listed as a train stop between Hunter's (later Huntersville) and Davidson College in the 1878 "Hassan's American and European Distance Tables" A map dated 1881 of North Carolina and South Carolina identifies the place as "Caldwells." (5) The Chas. Emerson & Co. Charlotte City Directory 1879-1880 lists "Caldwell" among the county's villages and lists three men named Caldwell among the village's "Business Men...and the Principal Farmers." Other villages listed include familiar names like Matthews, Paw Creek, and Huntersville, as well as now forgotten names like Hebron, Harrison, Irene, and Mutual Love. By 1895 there was a

one-teacher school in Caldwell. The 1912 Rand-McNally "New Commercial Atlas Map of North Carolina" identifies "Caldwells" as a town with a population of thirty.

<p><i>An Alphabetical List of the Villages and Post Offices in the County, giving their Location, and the names of the Business Men in each, and the Principal Farmers in the County.</i></p> <p>—:O:—</p>	
<p><b>Alexandriana.</b></p>	
<p>On A T &amp; O R R, 8 miles North of Charlotte.</p>	
Alexander A W, farmer	Dixon D F, farmer
Alexander W D, farmer.	Garrison W G, farmer
Bigham J H, physician	Henderson Mrs Leonora, farmer
Black E, farmer	Irwin John, physician
Black J, farmer	McAulay E A, farmer
Black Wm, farmer	McConnell T M, farmer
Caldwell Wm, farmer	Neel T W, farmer
Carroll L L, farmer	Oehler Jno, farmer
Cashion B, farmer	Parks A D, farmer
Cheshire Jno, farmer	Pharr Rev W W
DeArmon Ira, farmer	Price R, farmer
DeArmon J A, farmer	Woodruff G Egleston, Post Master and Merchant
DeArmon L W, farmer	
DeArmon R L, farmer	
<p><b>Caldwell.</b></p>	
<p>On A T &amp; O R R, 15 miles North of Charlotte.</p>	
Barnett A G, farmer	Caldwell Wm, farmer
Barnett S, farmer	DeArmond W P, farmer
Blackwelder John, farmer	Door J M, farmer
Bost C, farmer	Mayes D W, farmer
Bost I N, farmer	Mennley T M, farmer
Bounds J P, farmer	Oehler M T, farmer
Brattain J E, farmer	Reid James, farmer
Caldwell J, physician	Reid Wm, farmer
Caldwell M E, farmer	Wilson J M, physician

### Page from Chas. Emerson & Co. Charlotte City Directory 1879-1880

Why Caldwell did not survive as a discernable community is unclear. The emergence of the nearby town of Cornelius was the most likely cause. Cornelius is located at an important crossroads connecting the Statesville Highway (now highway 115) with Lincoln County and other places to the west. The town began with cotton trading around 1888; and in 1891 Richard Stough and his brother-in-law, Mr. C. W. Johnston (who later built the Johnson Mill in Charlotte) incorporated a cotton mill at the location, naming it the Cornelius Cotton Mill after their largest investor Joe Cornelius. The town grew quickly. In 1899 Cornelius opened a post office. Until then, mail for Cornelius was picked up at the Caldwell Post Office. The town of Cornelius was incorporated in 1905, and a school opened in Cornelius in 1906. (6) The post office in Caldwell closed in 1904. Trains continued to stop at Caldwell for passengers and freight, and the area began to be referred to as Caldwell Station. By 1938 aerial photographs indicate minimal development around the Caldwell Station area. A pre-war gas station was extant in the neighborhood

until it was recently demolished. A concrete railroad platform along with the school building are now the only indication that Caldwell Station was once a rural commercial and civic center.



**View of the Caldwell Station area looking north**



## The Caldwell Station School



Mecklenburg County citizens voted in 1880 to establish a graded public school system. This may have been in response to a high illiteracy rate in the 1880s. North Carolina ranked lower in literacy than all of the other states in the Union except South Carolina. (7) The early products of this vote in northern Mecklenburg include the 1890 Croft Schoolhouse and the ca.1890 Rural Hill School. The Caldwell Station School was established sometime before 1895. An 1895 photograph shows a frame building with approximately thirty children posed before the building.

Beginning in 1885 the Mecklenburg County Board of Education was ultimately responsible for the education of the children in the unincorporated sections of the county, and for students in some of the small towns (the city of Charlotte and the town of Davidson both operated their own schools). For the larger schools, such as the Huntersville School with 457 students in 1925, or the Cornelius School with 460 student, the board was directly involved in decisions concerning the development and operation of the schools. Among hundreds of decisions in 1925, the Board voted to purchase twelve railcar loads of Coal for the larger schools, to direct architect Louis Asbury to choose tile and brick for the new Steele Creek School, and they voted to oppose the teaching of evolution. However, from the late 19th century through the 1920s, most of the decisions concerning the county's small rural schools were delegated to local committees. These committees hired the teachers and built and maintained the schoolhouses. The rural communities in Mecklenburg County had to petition the Board of Education before building a new school; but once completed, the school was operated by the local residents. (8) This autonomy began to erode as the 20th century progressed. State laws that provided funding and the power to tax for public schools were enacted in 1901 and 1907. In 1913 a compulsory attendance law was passed that required all children between the ages of eight and twelve to attend at least four months of school. In 1919 that was raised to six months. As public education expanded in the state, educators



began to push for the consolidation of schools. Educators believed that one-room or one-teacher schools did not serve the students as well as "graded" schools. A vote in 1911 allowed education tax money to be used for transportation, and by the 1920s buses in Mecklenburg County were enabling consolidation of the smaller schools. (9)

The consolidation movement was played out in northern Mecklenburg in July of 1924 when the Board of Education approved a twenty-five cent levy on every \$100 of property value in the Caldwell *Bradford* School district and required that students from the one-teacher school be bused to the Caldwell Station School. The school term for the school would be eight months, and students would be educated through the sixth grade. Beyond the sixth grade students would be bused to the high school in Huntersville. (10) The action turned the Caldwell Station School into a "union" school.

The Board instructed the school superintendent, Plummer Stewart, to "confer with the local committees with reference to additional rooms at Caldwell Station." Apparently, additional rooms on the old building did not appear to be feasible. In March of 1925 the Board directed the superintendent to work with the local committee from Caldwell Station on the erection of a "new house." Will Knox is attributed with building the new schoolhouse. (11) Knox was a builder, farmer, and a member of the Caldwell Station School Committee. Knox probably led a community effort to build the building using volunteers and perhaps donated material. The nearby Mallard Creek School was constructed quickly using the same approach in 1920. (12) It appears that the new two-room Caldwell Station School building was ready for the beginning of the school year in the fall of 1925, because the Board of Education had approved in August of that year the use of the old Caldwell Bradford Schoolhouse by a women's community club. The new school featured two rooms separated by a removable partition. The building had no electricity and the classrooms were illuminated by large banks of windows. The building had no plumbing and was heated by two woodstoves.

When the Caldwell Station School opened in 1925 there were forty-eight students enrolled. That was larger than the nearby schools at Fidler (31 students), Bethel (32), or Alex-Iredell (38). But it was a much smaller enrollment than that of the Cornelius (460) and Huntersville (457) schools, which featured classes for grades one through eleven. (13) Wilson Knox began attending the Caldwell Station School in 1929 when he was in the third grade. He recalls that the two teachers were Miss Marie Vance and Miss Martha Millan. Students in grades one through three were educated in one classroom, with grades four through six in the other room. Knox remembers that an older student, Willie Nance, built the fires in the two woodstoves, and that one day as a prank someone stuffed the flue pipe full of newspaper. When Nance lit the fire, smoke filled the building. Water was drawn daily from a pump at the neighboring home of Chalmers Knox, and the boys were responsible for bringing the water to the classrooms. Children brought their lunches. While some students arrived by bus, many walked. Nell Washam Caldwell only attended the school for one year but remembers a large boiler from a nearby abandoned mill or factory that the children played on. (14) Train traffic was busy in front

of the school, and Wilson Knox remembers that there was a primitive passenger shelter near the school.



**Ca. 1929 Photograph of Caldwell Station School**

Even with the consolidation of the schools progressing, there was still considerable diversity among the rural schools, perhaps reflecting the continued autonomy of the local school committees. While the school term at the Caldwell Station School lasted eight months, the nearby Gilead and McDowell schools kept a seven month calendar. Unlike the six grades at Caldwell Station, the four-room Mallard Creek School offered classes through the seventh grade. Caldwell Station students were bused to Huntersville for high school. It was different at Mallard Creek. In 1926 the Board of Education gave Mallard Creek parents the option of stopping education at the seventh grade, paying individually to attend Huntersville High School, or instituting a new tax levy of fifteen cents to cover the cost of attending the higher grades. (15)

This diversity of rural elementary schooling in Mecklenburg County began to end as the Board of Education voted to close more of the rural schools. In 1927, just two years after the Caldwell Station School was built, the Board voted to discontinue elementary education at both the Caldwell Station and Mallard Creek schools. This process took until 1931 to complete, and the Caldwell Station School continued to operate. Farmer J. W. Washam was selected as the Board's committeeman in 1928. He was replaced by W. M. Know in 1929, and the last committeeman was G. R. Mayes who was appointed in 1930. During the 1930-31 school year the sixth grade students from Caldwell Station attended the unified Huntersville School. Nell Caldwell remembers that with an odd number of grades, the third-graders would start with one teacher, and then move to the other classroom in the afternoon. In the spring of 1931 no new committee appointments were made for the Caldwell Station School, and on August 1, 1931 it was reported to the board that "the people of Caldwell Station...voted to send their children to Huntersville School." (16)

The American Legion was quick to make an offer on the Caldwell Station School building and property. A price of \$600 was agreed upon in March of 1932, and the site was sold to American Legion Post #86 in April. (17) The American Legion expanded the building with a full-width rear shed addition which greatly enlarged the formerly shallow building. This allowed the Post to hold square dances in the building. (18) The building was later sold into private hands and was used as a commercial space until it was purchased in 1991 by a preschool. It is now known as the Children's Schoolhouse, and is again functioning as an educational facility.

## **Architectural Context**

The autonomy of the local committees and communities is reflected in the diversity of the designs of the surviving schoolhouses in northern Mecklenburg County.



The side-gabled Caldwell Station Schoolhouse has little in common with the ca. 1920 Mallard Creek School, a four-teacher frame schoolhouse, which was also built in northern Mecklenburg County. The massed building is set on brick piers and features a center entrance sheltered by a shed roof. The building's most distinguishing feature is a steeply pitched hipped roof pierced by two internal chimney at the ridge. Likewise, the nearby small front-gabled Caldwell Bradford School (now remodeled as a home) shares little architecturally with the Caldwell Station Schoolhouse.



Architecturally the Caldwell Station Schoolhouse has much more in common with the African American schools of the 1920s built in Mecklenburg County, than with the county's other rural white schools. The nearby Caldwell Rosenwald School was built in

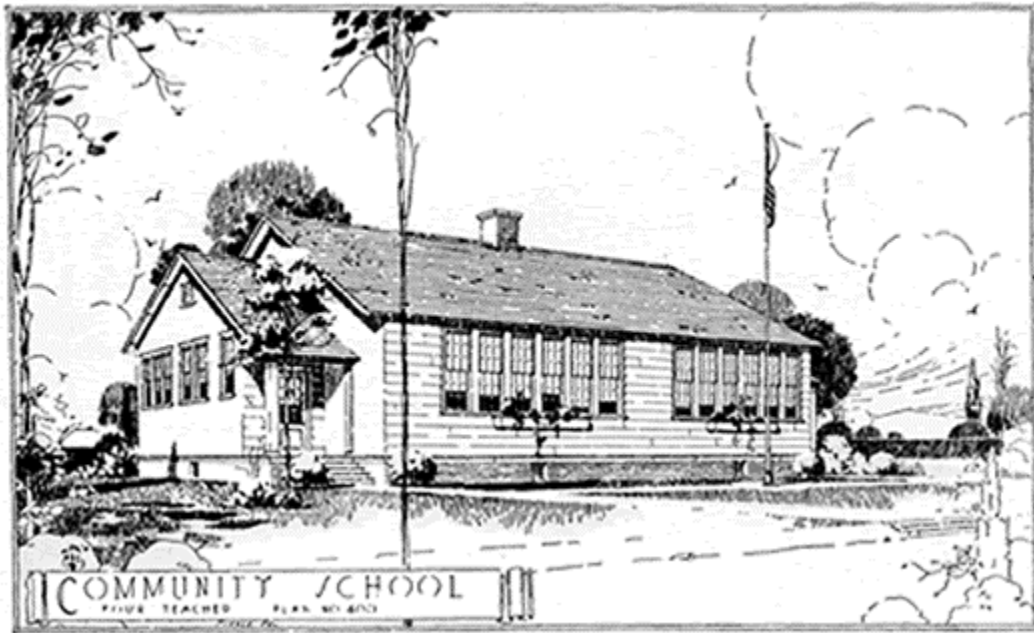
1925 to serve the black children who lived along the Catawba River in northern Mecklenburg County. The Caldwell Rosenwald School and the Caldwell Station School bear a strikingly similar appearance, especially if one considers that the Caldwell Station School's central entrance was a later addition. Both are side-gabled buildings that feature on the facade two banks of six tall sash windows that run uninterrupted to the roofline. Both also feature a shallow gabled wing containing the entrance. The buildings are not identical. The Caldwell Rosenwald School is a four-classroom building and is much deeper than the Caldwell Station School, with less steeply pitched gables.

In contrast to the white rural schools in Mecklenburg County, the African American schools built in the county during the 1920s followed professionally developed plans distributed by the Julius Rosenwald Foundation throughout the South. Julius Rosenwald was the President of Sears, Roebuck and Company. His foundation distributed funding and plans for African-American schools that were cost-effective to build, and resulted in a orderly and well lit learning space. One of the most recognizable features of the Rosenwald schools was the use of banks of tall sash windows like those found on the Caldwell School. These large banks of windows were especially important as many rural schools lacked electricity. There were at least twenty-six Rosenwald schools built in Mecklenburg County. It is not surprising that these practical, well designed plans inspired the building of white schools as well.

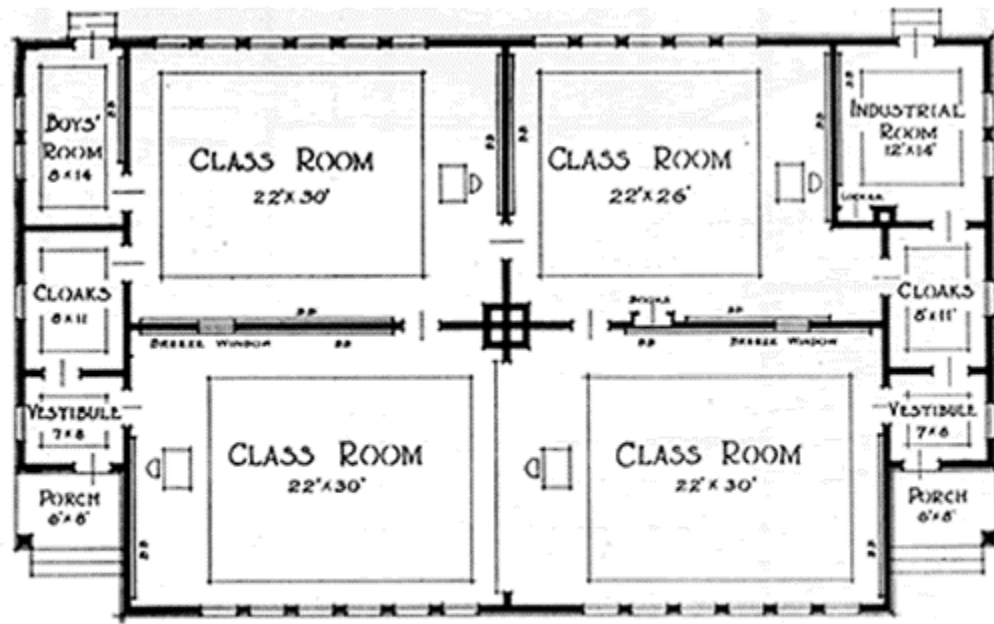


Caldwell Station School above. Caldwell School (Rosenwald) below.



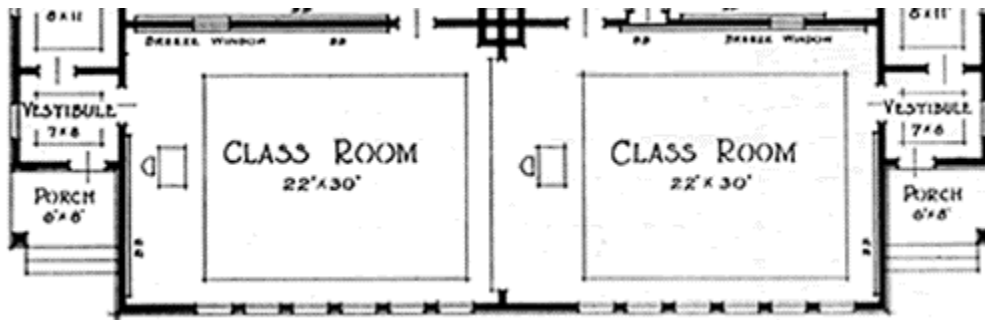


The above is a rendering of the #400 Rosenwald four-teacher school building published by the Rosenwald Foundation illustrates that the Caldwell School closely adhered to the published plans. Below is the #400 floor plan.



FLOOR PLAN NO 400  
FOUR TEACHER COMMUNITY SCHOOL  
TO FACE EAST OR WEST ONLY

As built, the Caldwell Station School, in essence, used half of the floor plan for the #400 building (shown below), and replicated the facade



## NOTES

1. Post Offices in the United States, Arranged in Alphabetical Order, (Washington: J&GS Gideon Printers,) 1842



2. Chalmers Davidson describes Hickory Grove and Glenwood in his book The Plantation World Around Davidson (Davidson: Davidson Printing Company, 1969)

3. "North Carolina Railroads - Passenger and Freight Lines" Website:

[http://www.carolana.com/NC/Transportation/railroads/nc\\_railroads.htm](http://www.carolana.com/NC/Transportation/railroads/nc_railroads.htm)

4. "Postal History" Website: <http://www.postalhistory.com/index.htm>

5. "Gray's new map of North Carolina and South Carolina," (Philadelphia: O. W. Gray & Son, 1881) Available at the Carolina Room of the PLCMC.

6. LeGette Blythe and Charles R. Brockmann, *Hornet's Nest*, (Charlotte: McNally, 1961) p. 419.

7. Sarah A. Woodard and Sherry Joines Wyatt, "Industry, Transportation, and Education: The New South Development of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County," 2001. Part of a National Register Survey prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

8. "Mecklenburg County Board of Education, The Minute Book 1885-1960" Unpublished minutes in the J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

9. Sarah A. Woodard and Sherry Joines Wyatt, "Industry, Transportation, and Education: The New South Development of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County," 2001. Part of a National Register Survey prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

10. "Mecklenburg County Board of Education, The Minute Book 1885-1960" Unpublished minutes in the J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

11. Interview with Wilson Knox, October 2009, by the author. Wilson Knox was born in 1919, and attended the Caldwell Station School in 1929.

12. Emily D. Ramsey, "Survey and Research Report of the Mallard Creek School," 2000. Prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

13. "Mecklenburg County Board of Education, The Minute Book 1885-1960" Unpublished minutes in the J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

14. Interview with Nell Washam Caldwell, September 2009, by the author.

15. "Mecklenburg County Board of Education, The Minute Book 1885-1960" Unpublished minutes in the J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

16. Ibid

17. Ibid

18. Interview with Wilson Knox.